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Evaluation

Evaluation of the UNDP contribution to South-South cooperation

Executive summary

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I. Introduction

1. The present report sets out the findings and recommendations of an evaluation of the UNDP contribution to South-South cooperation. The evaluation focused on the assessment of the Third Cooperation Framework for South-South Cooperation managed by the Special Unit for South-South Cooperation, UNDP efforts in promoting and supporting South-South cooperation, and the effectiveness of the collaboration between UNDP and the Special Unit. The assessment is situated within relevant intergovernmental mandates for UNDP and the Special Unit, as well as the emerging realities of South-South cooperation. The scope of the study covers the period 1996 to 2007 and all geographic regions.

II. Context

2. Over the past 30 years, there has been a remarkable upsurge in South-South cooperation. Sustained economic growth since the late 1980s has led an increasing number of developing countries to become regional centres of economic dynamism. South-South trade has been growing and made up 26 per cent of developing-country exports in 2004, and many developing countries have accumulated large financial surpluses. South-South foreign direct investment flows grew faster than North-South flows during the 1990s. The number of large Southern transnational corporations grew from just 19 in 1990 to 58 by 2005.

3. Much of the growth in South-South cooperation is happening without the participation of the United Nations development system, a welcome indication of effective leadership and capacity in the South. Nevertheless, the changing international environment has increased demands on the United Nations system. While mutual cooperation between developing countries is growing, there is concurrent demand on multilateral organizations for support in guiding the flow of resources to ensure that all benefit from South-South cooperation; to draw attention to the problems and challenges faced by developing countries; and to encourage mutual support. Member countries expect the United Nations system, with its universal presence and neutrality, to mainstream South-South cooperation as a cross-cutting theme in its work. They expect the United Nations system to respond robustly to reports of slow progress in many developing countries towards the Millennium Development Goals and other internationally agreed development goals.

4. UNDP is expected to help build capacities in countries of the South to support them achieve their development goals, including the Millennium Development Goals. South-South cooperation is expected to be an integral part of UNDP work, given its stated position as a knowledge-based organization and its role in the exchange of development experience, through its global network of country offices and its support to the Special Unit.

Rationale and objective

5. The present evaluation was requested by the Executive Board of UNDP and is part of the agenda of the UNDP Evaluation Office approved by the Board in June 2006. The evaluation underpins the Administrator's substantive accountability to the Executive Board. Findings of the evaluation will provide substantive inputs to the fourth cooperation framework for South-South cooperation (2008-2010), to be

presented to the Board in January 2008, and to the implementation of the UNDP strategic plan, 2008-2011.

6. The objective of the evaluation was to assess the UNDP contribution to South-South cooperation over the past decade, as well as the performance of the third cooperation framework. The evaluation sought to provide major 'lessons learned' by assessing what worked and why. It offers recommendations for strengthening the effectiveness of future programming efforts in South-South cooperation.

III. Approach and methodology

7. The evaluation addressed the organizational strategy of UNDP and its initiatives to promote South-South cooperation at the global, regional and country levels. At the same time, it assessed the implementation of the third cooperation framework for South-South cooperation as well as the nature and extent of interaction between the Special Unit and UNDP. It did not cover the full mandate of the Special Unit which is detailed in paragraph 14 below.

8. The evaluation addressed the following key issues:

(a) The nature and extent of support provided by the Special Unit and UNDP in promoting and expanding South-South cooperation;

(b) The ability of UNDP and the Special Unit to learn from experience in South-South cooperation to strengthen and institutionalize support to South-South cooperation across all UNDP practice areas;

(c) The appropriateness, relevance, effectiveness and sustainability of UNDP efforts to meet the varied and evolving demands to strengthen and expand South-South cooperation; and

(d) UNDP preparedness to address emerging demands in South-South cooperation.

9. The evaluation gathered evidence through eight country case studies, including a desk study; a desk review of the relevant secondary material; interviews with staff in Geneva and New York, and an electronic survey of United Nations units in programme countries. Given the wide variations in the practice of South-South cooperation combined with limited time and resources, random selection was not feasible. Adopting a purposive approach, countries were selected to reflect varied experience in South-South cooperation, regional distribution and geographical constraints (e.g. small island developing states and landlocked developing countries). Based on those criteria, Barbados, Brazil, China, Guatemala, Mali, South Africa and Thailand were selected, and an in-depth desk study was conducted in India. Brazil was chosen as the pilot study.

10. Over 248 stakeholders were consulted in case-study countries, Geneva and New York. In each case-study country, stakeholders included the United Nations country team, government officials, bilateral donors, civil societies and the UNDP country office; other stakeholders included UNDP headquarters units, United Nations organizations in New York and Geneva, and Permanent Missions of States Members of the United Nations.

11. The electronic survey, designed to gather essential information about South-South cooperation activities and perceptions, was addressed to United Nations resident coordinators, who forwarded the survey to other country team members.

Responses were received from 149 members of United Nations country teams from 51 countries, including all the UNDP resident representatives.

12. Secondary evidence was gathered from UNDP evaluations of the second global cooperation framework and evaluations of four regional cooperation frameworks, namely, Africa, Arab States, Asia and the Pacific, and Latin America and the Caribbean.

IV. History and mandate

13. In response to mounting pressure for a new economic order during the 1970s, and in support of the principle of collective self-reliance among developing countries, General Assembly resolution 3251 established the Special Unit for Technical Cooperation among Developing Countries (TCDC) within UNDP. In 1978, following a conference on TCDC, the Buenos Aires Plan of Action proposed a set of guiding principles and an action plan for promoting and implementing TCDC, with specific recommendations for the United Nations development system.

14. General Assembly resolution 33/144 (subsequently elaborated by the High-level Committee on South-South cooperation and the Executive Board of UNDP) charged the Special Unit with (a) facilitating coordination of the promotional and other TCDC activities of the United Nations development system; (b) coordinating TCDC matters within UNDP; (c) carrying out research studies and analyses of TCDC issues and problems; (d) promoting wider use of the capacities of developing countries; (e) developing and strengthening the information referral system, now known as the 'web of information for development' (WIDE), and the inquiry service; promoting their broader use through appropriate linkages with information systems in other organizations of the United Nations development system and in national institutions; and (f) mobilizing resources for TCDC.

15. The High-Level Committee on the Review of TCDC was established in 1980 as the highest policy and oversight body under and reporting to the General Assembly. The Special Unit for South-South cooperation was charged with being the substantive secretariat for the Committee, in addition to its responsibilities as the global and United Nations system-wide advocate, catalyst and resource mobilizer of South-South cooperation.

16. The Executive Board of UNDP, in its decision 2004/32 stated that South-South cooperation should be considered a driver of development effectiveness and be incorporated in the second multi-year funding framework (2004-2007).

17. More recently, the Executive Board in its decision 2007/32 reiterated that UNDP should promote South-South cooperation by stepping up efforts to seek South-South solutions in all its focus areas, as a way of enhancing the exchange of best practices and support among developing countries, regardless of their levels of development. It also required the Administrator, in consultation with the Executive Board, to establish measurable targets for the Special Unit for South-South cooperation. It further emphasized that UNDP should take a human development-based approach to programming.

V. Programmatic activities

18. Three cooperation frameworks approved by the Executive Board of UNDP have provided the structure for the work of the Special Unit since 1997. The three key elements of the third cooperation framework are: policy advocacy, dialogue and promotion; public-private partnerships; and sharing Southern development knowledge. Funding for the third cooperation framework comes from three sources: UNDP regular ('core') resources; resources mobilized by the Special Unit; and funds managed by the Special Unit. Annual resources available to the Special Unit have declined in real terms over the past decade, though the nominal value has not changed. Regular resources available to the Special Unit have declined.

19. UNDP pursues South-South cooperation in global, regional and country programmes, either as a modality to improve programme performance or with South-South cooperation as the programme goal. Global initiatives come under the global programme managed by the Bureau for Development Policy; regional programmes are managed by the regional bureaux; and country programmes are developed and implemented by country offices in close partnership with the national government.

20. Communities of practice, or 'knowledge networks', are linked to the global programme and are designed to position UNDP as a knowledge-based organization. Knowledge networks help those working in similar practice or thematic areas to share Southern experience and knowledge. The networks are continuing to grow and are widely used by members.

21. Regional programmes seek to address challenges in areas such as regional public goods; trafficking; drugs; HIV/AIDS; disaster prevention and response; water supply and use, and environmental management. The regional programmes enable countries to advocate collectively for equitable and transparent trade regimes and other areas of common interest.

22. Responses to surveys and case studies show that it is common for country offices to seek solutions and expertise from developing countries with similar experience, often through knowledge networks or communities of practice, and, in some instances, through face-to-face exchanges. In such examples, South-South cooperation serves as a modality to identify best development practices.

23. Institutional links between the operations of UNDP and the Special Unit have evolved over the years. Since 1997, three cooperation frameworks have formalized collaborative arrangements. The second cooperation framework, for instance, sought to develop a strategy to mainstream South-South cooperation within UNDP as part of its efforts to mainstream South-South cooperation in the United Nations system.

24. The Special Unit provides guidelines for promoting South-South cooperation in UNDP. *Revised Guidelines for the review of Policies and Procedures Concerning TCDC* was first issued by the Special Unit in 1997 and has been in use by United Nations organizations ever since. The evaluation noted that the Director of the Special Unit had previously been a member of the Executive Committee of UNDP, but was not a member of the Operations Group that replaced it.

25. UNDP made the following commitments to support and promote South-South cooperation:

(a) In the 1992-96 programme cycle, UNDP identified TCDC as one of its six priority programmes and allocated special programme resources to the Special Unit's activities.

(b) In response to the request from the High-Level Committee for South-South cooperation at its 10th session, UNDP allocated 0.5 per cent of overall programme resources to the Special Unit under the cooperation framework for TCDC, 1997-1999 (estimated at $15 million).

(c) The UNDP Administrator announced in 1997 that, as a matter of corporate policy, TCDC would receive "first consideration" in UNDP programming; TCDC would be mainstreamed in all UNDP programmes and projects; and support to TCDC would become one of the core responsibilities of UNDP resident representatives in the 1997-1999 programme cycle.

(d) The UNDP multi-year funding framework, 2004-2007, recognized South-South cooperation as one of the six 'drivers' of development effectiveness to be consciously integrated into UNDP programming.

VI. Key findings, conclusions and recommendations

26. The evaluation recognized that the effectiveness of UNDP programmes in promoting and supporting South-South cooperation depends upon the priority each country places on South-South cooperation; the demand from programme countries to involve UNDP; and UNDP capacity to provide support. The governmental expert panel convened by the Administrator in identified the following constraints to realizing the full potential of TCDC in countries and the United Nations system: lack of awareness of potential as well as lack of information on usefulness and applicability; lack of effective focal points; lack of policies and procedures; and shortage of funds. The evaluation found that those constraints persist.

27. UNDP and the Special Unit have amassed considerable experience in South-South cooperation and are well positioned to play a more active and effective role in supporting and promoting it. UNDP has expressed strong commitment to South-South cooperation in its strategic plans. However, UNDP and the Special Unit have been unable to deliver fully on their mandate to promote and support South-South cooperation. The electronic survey showed that of the respondents only 19 per cent of United Nations country team members and 22 per cent of resident representatives felt that the overall contribution of UNDP to promote South-South cooperation over the past five years had been 'effective' or 'very effective'. The following discussion presents the conclusions of that study in understanding the performance of UNDP and the Special Unit in contributing to South-South cooperation.

A. Conclusions

Conclusion 1: The effectiveness of support under the third cooperation framework is constrained by the mismatch among the mandate, resources and implementation strategy of the Special Unit.

28. The mandate of the Special Unit is extensive, not only relative to UNDP but in absolute terms. It has evolved and expanded over time and the Special Unit acts as secretariat to the High-level Committee on South-South Cooperation; coordinates United Nations system-wide South-South cooperation efforts; mobilizes resources

and manages funds for South-South cooperation, and supports South-South cooperation within the United Nations development system. The Special Unit has difficulty in managing all the activities in such a broad mandate with its available resources ($3.5 million per annum in regular resources and $5.5 million per annum in other resources) and 15 professional staff members.

29. The three platforms of the third cooperation framework for South-South cooperation provide a useful conceptual tool for identifying areas of intervention: a platform to support policy dialogue, with emphasis on mainstreaming South-South cooperation as a driver of development effectiveness; a platform to help create an enabling environment for public-private partnership mechanisms for South-South business collaboration and technical exchange; and a platform to manage and share development knowledge. However, in developing the initiatives, evidence indicates that the Special Unit paid insufficient attention to assessing and prioritizing demand from consultations with target countries. Consequently, the activities of the Special Unit are too numerous and diffused, further constraining its resources and capacity and limiting its ability to respond to requests for support.

30. The Special Unit-developed 'Revised Guidelines for the Review of Polices and Procedures Concerning South-South Cooperation' (TCDC/13/3). including a common results framework for the United Nations development system engaged in South-South cooperation, which was approved by the High-level Committee and the General Assembly in 2003. However, the Special Unit itself continues to report activities as results, and has not produced a results framework that ties outputs and outcomes to clearly defined qualitative and quantitative indicators. Consequently, its reviews offer limited evaluative evidence and learning opportunities.

Conclusion 2: UNDP has not developed at corporate level a robust and proactive approach to South-South cooperation.

31. UNDP is mandated to support and promote South-South cooperation by hosting the Special Unit for South-South Cooperation and through all relevant UNDP-supported programmes.

32. UNDP does not have a clear strategic framework to leverage the Special Unit and its own programmes to support South-South cooperation. South-South cooperation was declared a driver of development effectiveness in the second multi-year funding framework (2004-2007), and as a principle of development effectiveness in the strategic plan, 2008-2011. Yet these plans did not articulate the UNDP strategic priorities, deliverables and modalities of engagement in South-South cooperation.

33. There are no clear strategies or institutional mechanisms to respond adequately to the dynamic changes occurring in South-South cooperation, such as the rapid expansion of interregional exchanges and trade, and massive trade surpluses in many pivotal countries resulting in new financing arrangements and opportunities to promote South-South cooperation. There is continuing demand from developing countries for support to permit them to benefit from these changes.

34. In addition, UNDP has no clear partnership strategies to support and strengthen South-South cooperation within the United Nations development system or among countries of the South. Case studies show that other United Nations organizations are actively involved in South-South cooperation, yet coordination of United Nations system-wide efforts to prioritize South-South cooperation in national development agendas remains ad hoc and inadequate in many countries.

35. The development context varies among the countries of the South. Some countries have taken a lead in South-South cooperation and do not require support from the United Nations system; others have requested UNDP support for their initiatives. Some countries have yet to fully recognize the potential of South-South cooperation and require encouragement to stimulate demand. Clear strategies to partner with governments are not fully in place, especially in pivotal countries, to support and promote the demand for South-South cooperation.

36. UNDP, with its global presence, has yet to adopt a robust approach to supporting a two-way flow of knowledge and multi-dimensional experience among all the countries in the South.

Conclusion 3: UNDP is a responsive partner at the country level. However, its effectiveness is constrained by uneven recognition, inadequate resources and incentives and an inability to systematize learning.

37. Many initiatives that are under way in UNDP have South-South elements but are not corporately recognized as such. There is limited shared understanding of the concept of South-South cooperation across the organization, and inadequate recognition of the value added by South-South cooperation at the operational level.

38. UNDP has not provided adequate resources to mainstream South-South cooperation in its own programming. While it provides the bulk of Special Unit resources, it has not been able to sustain the commitment made during the first cooperation framework (1997) to allocate 0.5 per cent of its programme resources annually to the Special Unit.

39. Much of what UNDP is doing on South-South cooperation is the result of individual initiatives and leadership. There is a lack of clear incentives and guidance to integrate South-South cooperation in global, regional and country programmes.

40. The accountability and reporting systems of UNDP do not adequately reflect the priority of supporting South-South cooperation.

41. UNDP does not conduct systematic analysis of the information contained in its knowledge networks. Such analysis might help to distil modalities of engagement in South-South cooperation with a view to mapping demand areas, identifying capacity needs, and codifying the wide experience of UNDP. Nor has UNDP built a body of evaluative evidence on its contribution to South-South cooperation to enable the organization to learn from its own experience.

Conclusion 4: UNDP and the Special Unit have not fully leveraged their collective strengths and capacities.

42. The Special Unit has convening power and specialized knowledge to facilitate interest and catalyze demand among partner countries. UNDP has a networked global presence, a mandate to coordinate at the country level, and, in general, close interaction with programme country partners. Yet they have not fully leveraged each other's strengths.

43. There are no clear collaborative arrangements between the Special Unit and UNDP at different levels of operation. The UNDP strategic plan, 2008-2011, does not reflect areas of collaboration spelled out in the third cooperation framework for South-South cooperation. UNDP has not worked with the Special Unit to codify relevant experience with South-South cooperation emerging from its practice networks. And the Special Unit has not leveraged the UNDP network of country

offices to identify areas of focus, or to coordinate South-South cooperation efforts of the United Nations system at the country level.

B. Recommendations

44. The rapid evolution of South-South cooperation has opened a window of opportunity for developing countries to use it as a means towards internationally agreed development goals, including the MDGs. The United Nations development system has an important partnership role. Within this partnership, UNDP must clearly define the contours of its engagement with South-South cooperation and revamp its institutional arrangements, including its relationship with the Special Unit.

45. The following recommendations cover the cooperation framework for South-South cooperation and the role of the Special Unit; the responsibility, strategic approach and institutional arrangements of UNDP; and collaborative arrangements between UNDP and the Special Unit. These recommendations are intended to be mutually reinforcing and to be treated as a whole.

Recommendation 1: The Fourth Cooperation Framework for South-South cooperation managed by the Special Unit should be shaped around three activity streams – knowledge sharing, policy development and advocacy and catalyzing innovation. Initiatives in each of these streams should be time-bound and results-oriented.

46. The evaluation found that the thrust and the key elements of the third cooperation framework are still relevant and that the Special Unit had achieved most of the outputs. However, the full potential of results has not been attained due to their limited capacity and inadequate leveraging of the strength of the United Nations development system. The specific recommendations below do not envisage a fundamental change in the content of the third cooperation framework, but rather enable the Special Unit to engage more closely with the United Nations system to increase its effectiveness in support of countries.

Knowledge sharing for South-South experience

47. The Special Unit should continue to serve as the repository of knowledge on South-South cooperation for the international community and the United Nations system. The Unit should systematically engage with governments and all United Nations organizations to distil good practice, identify proven solutions and expertise, and codify experience in a user-friendly interactive system accessible by the international development community.

48. The Special Unit should conduct research and analysis of key emerging trends in South-South cooperation. It should gauge emerging needs by assessing the outcomes of the deliberations of relevant intergovernmental fora, and by pooling and synthesizing the experience of United Nations system organizations.

Policy development and Advocacy for South-South cooperation

49. The Special Unit should continue their advocacy efforts through intergovernmental fora, regional bodies and national-level stakeholders. The Special Unit should document outcomes from these efforts to influence the future practice of South-South cooperation.

50. The Special Unit should more effectively engage with all United Nations development organizations to mainstream South-South cooperation as a modality for development effectiveness. It should establish a mechanism or mechanisms for systematic engagement with partners to address shared priorities and action plans. These could include updating guidelines for policies and procedures related to South-South cooperation and periodic consultations within the United Nations development system.

Catalyzing and innovating to meet emerging demands of South-South cooperation

51. The Special Unit should:

(a) Identify appropriate priorities for action in emerging areas of South-South cooperation by mapping demand through consultation with target countries and the United Nations system, supplemented by analysis;

(b) Develop a select portfolio of time-bound, results-oriented pilot initiatives to address critical issues in the areas identified, with the objective of defining effective South-South solutions that can be scaled up and/or replicated by countries with the support of the United Nations system as appropriate. This portfolio should be of manageable size, and should be flexible enough to accommodate demands as they emerge. The Special Unit should undertake only a limited number of pilot activities at any given time;

(c) Support countries in developing policy frameworks to enable them to address opportunities and constraints in the expansion of South-South cooperation, in areas such as public-private partnerships and civil society engagement; and

(d) Manage funds for South-South cooperation on behalf of countries of the South within an accountable and clearly defined results-oriented framework.

52. The fourth cooperation framework and its components should be built around clear outcomes linked to the mandate of the Special Unit. The results chain should logically link the outputs to outcomes.

Recommendation 2: In programming initiatives, the Special Unit should adopt strict criteria, and leverage the capacities of UNDP and other relevant United Nations organizations to enhance the contribution of South-South cooperation to development effectiveness.

53. The evaluation found that the Special Unit is not sufficiently using criteria established by intergovernmental fora; nor is it adequately leveraging the global networked presence of UNDP and the specialized mandates of the organizations of the United Nations development system. The following recommendations envisage that the Special Unit will continue using its convening power and specialized knowledge to initiate pilot activities but expand their partnership with relevant United Nations organizations.

54. The initiatives under the fourth cooperation framework should strictly adhere to the following criteria:

(a) Strong demand from member countries (Buenos Aires Plan of Action);

(b) Defined impact on a large number of countries (*New Directions for TCDC, 1995*), and

(c) A clear results framework, with a results chain linking outputs of initiatives to outcomes sought by the cooperation framework (TCDC/13/3).

55. The Special Unit should partner with governments and relevant United Nations agencies in its pilot initiatives from the outset, with a view to mutual learning, codification and integration of the pilot experience into the programming respective of the respective government or organization.

56. The Special Unit should have a clear exit strategy from pilot projects. The government or partner organization should be prepared to scale up and replicate successful activities, and provide feedback on programme experience and results to the knowledge base of the Special Unit.

Recommendation 3: UNDP should develop a corporate strategy on South-South cooperation that addresses emerging issues, draws on its own experience, integrates all its programme frameworks, and is underpinned by resources, incentives and accountability.

57. UNDP has islands of success in South-South cooperation which have not been integrated into a corporate approach. The following recommendations address prioritization in programming and steps for institutionalization.

(a) At the corporate level, UNDP should respond to the dynamic changes taking place in South-South cooperation, and to emerging priorities. In so doing, UNDP must consistently and fully reflect the human development mandate and the rights-based approach to development. It should identify key partners and modalities of partnership in diverse contexts, including pivotal countries.

(b) UNDP should identify a clear set of deliverables on South-South cooperation for which it assumes responsibility. This should be done through an internal discussion together with the Special Unit and in consultation with partner countries and the United Nations system.

(c) UNDP should develop a results framework in its strategic plan for its South-South cooperation initiatives, with clear benchmarks and indicators to assess its contribution to South-South cooperation. To support this assessment, an effective monitoring and evaluation mechanism of all related programming activity must be put in place to track performance.

(d) UNDP should identify South-South cooperation priorities through its own programming experience at the country, regional and global levels, findings from the analysis of the Special Unit, and systematic consultations with programme countries. In particular, UNDP should mine the experience gained in supporting conflict prevention and recovery, disaster preparedness, climate change, trade and intra-south development cooperation.

(e) UNDP should develop an approach to systematically link South-South considerations in the practice areas, as well as programming at country, regional and global levels; proactively require all practice areas to have South-South concerns as an element; develop clear guidance material in the *Results Management Guide* based on TCDC/13/3; and ensure support to South-South cooperation at all levels of UNDP programming.

(f) UNDP should reflect the priority placed on South-South cooperation in the allocation and tracking of resources, performance incentives, and accountability and reporting systems.

Recommendation 4: Define clear collaboration arrangements between the Special Unit and UNDP.

58. The evaluation found that collaboration between UNDP and the Special Unit is not adequately institutionalized. UNDP needs to recognize that the mandate of the Special Unit goes beyond the work of UNDP and that the cooperation framework should support the full mandate. The following recommendations cover roles and responsibilities, resource allocation and joint efforts at codification and coordination.

(a) The Director of the Special Unit should be a member of the Operations Group. Clear collaborative arrangements between the Special Unit and the regional and practice bureaux of UNDP need to be established. Periodic reporting and discussion of the implementation of the fourth cooperation framework and on the results of collaboration with the regional bureaux, corporate units and country offices should take place in the Operations Group.

(b) UNDP should revisit its 1997 commitment to provide 0.5 per cent of its total programming resources to South-South cooperation and ensure that predictable, adequate resources are made available to both UNDP and the Special Unit to fulfil the mandate on South-South cooperation.

(c) UNDP should provide the Special Unit with a platform on which to engage with United Nations country teams on South-South cooperation at the country level.

(d) UNDP and the Special Unit should work together to codify existing experience related to South-South cooperation by analyzing trends, capacity needs and demands, and make the information accessible to partners.